

## The Camel and the Rabbit

I was wandering through the middle part of natural human life, and thoroughly lost.

I intended to muddle onward inside a person I no longer cared to despise. Walking through life's cesspool, I happened upon a disheveled, ascetically-skinny, naked man, covered with signs of body mortifications. His hands were tattooed; on the left was a camel, and on the right was a rabbit. He offered his hands to me; I cannot explain why I took them. He pulled me along.

I struggled to believe what was happening. My soul knew the man who guided me. I remembered reading about him for my world history classes.

The great father of Jainism came to see me? Why?

"Hello, Mahavira?"

"Were you expecting Virgil? Not this time!" Mahavira quipped.

"Why do you have these tattoos?"

"Clues, for you," said Mahavira, with a deliberate smirk.

"But, Mahavira, what is happening?"

Mahavira replied, "The way to your Paradiso is through what I call "non-attachment." Non-attachment will feel to you as "hell," though. You should start with a choice to struggle until mastery of ordeals is gained, and then work on earning redemption."

Mahavira led me to an odd environment--a tiny, empty room. Heat and humidity, almost vitriolic, greeted me with the words, "All hope abandon ye who enter here."

Mahavira propelled me inside.

"Will you not come with me, Mahavira?"

"I was sent to direct you, but I cannot learn for you. Your practice is your own responsibility."

Mahavira slammed the door behind me.

My *contrapasso* in this "non-attachment" Inferno materializes into unyielding yoga practice...

Hard work teaches me: the camel and the rabbit are complementary parts of me. I am the camel, with the strength in my core, the openness and flexibility, and stamina to last through the journey (even while deserted—no one can perform the poses for me). The camel is the yogini of death to the person I was once. I am the rabbit, so fast and sleight as to outwit the mind, and outrun the long and stretching path against all temptation to stop. The rabbit is the prolific spirit inside me.

And how do a camel and rabbit experience non-attachment? See upside-down! My camel knows her weakness and limitations, and my rabbit knows that expectations of perfection, and the brutality of self-doubt, menace. My camel's determination to reach the end, however, takes me to wonderful fatigue, where my rabbit's cyclone of the mind is mollified. Acceptance of challenges leads me to moments of release from untruthful pain. I wrestle with angels so as to slay demons. I tremble through serenity, and see bits of Reality. Engagement in, and freedom from, the material world, all at once! Amazing Totality!

Here, I merge into a family of seekers of Heaven. I edge a sliver closer to understanding Siddhartha's pursuit of the awakening. Or, falling on my knees in the middle of attempts, and finding some willingness to rise again, gives me a glimpse into the divine courage of Christ. I can submit, indeed surrender, to a Force greater than I. The cosmos forgives me in these moments, and my soul feels microscopic success toward escape from *Samsāra*. My eyes are clear, aware of enlightened, creative

expression and passion. I embrace contradictions (vulnerability and power, anguish and euphoria), which make sense of everything.

The fever of my former madness breaks for a moment, until I walk again in the ordinary world.

My walk through life continues; Paradiso has not been earned, yet. My camel's journey is a process that will last my whole life. My rabbit must survive on her wits and speed alone for days to come.

Hence, I return and spend more time in Inferno, as often as I can. Each time, I advance through the efforts of two parts of me, camel and rabbit, I feel lucky to have met. I see the distance to Paradiso shorten for me every time.

And, somewhere, Mahavira approves.